

PIRATES, TITANS, AND FALCONS

DISCOVERING THE HISTORY OF PALMER TRINITY SCHOOL

By Mark Hayes, English Department

As a writer, after I've been in a place for a while, I like to know the proper names of things and the stories that lie behind them. For example, those little lizards one sees all over the place in South Florida, they're not geckoes or chameleons, but are properly identified as *anoles* -- of the family *polychrotidae*.

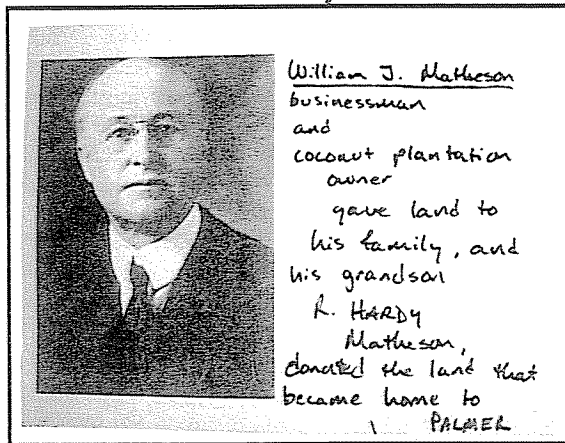
Under stress -- when being handled, let's say -- small dark spots form on the creature's skin, commonly around the eyes. I think these are good things to know, if only because they make me feel connected to this place.

But, leaving lizard-wrangling behind, here at Palmer Trinity School, it sometimes seems that we work and learn and play in a place that's forgotten its past. How many of us in the community would know where to find Shafer Hall, Warrington Wing, Posie's Garden, the Yarbrough Building, or Brockway Field? Is the Matheson Building, the school library, related to the same Matheson of the park and the nature preserve? Is it true that, way back in 1972 when the Old Cutler campus first opened, it was called Gulliver Prep? What remained of

the school after Hurricane Andrew? Who was Pace Webber? Who was Captain Hester and what did he do with all those mangoes?

In the senior elective, Writing South Florida, these are some of the many questions we've discovered in the course of a year studying the Sunshine State, the region of South Florida, the neighborhoods of Miami-Dade, and our own little postage stamp of resident soil here at Palmer Trinity. Writing South Florida grew out of another course I used to teach, College Writing, a process-based composition and research class where the content is driven by the academic interests of the students. Working in small groups, students read and discussed essays and articles from scholarly journals. I encouraged students to follow their own intellectual paths and, in their writing projects, to make good use of the electronic databases and collections available through the Matheson Library.

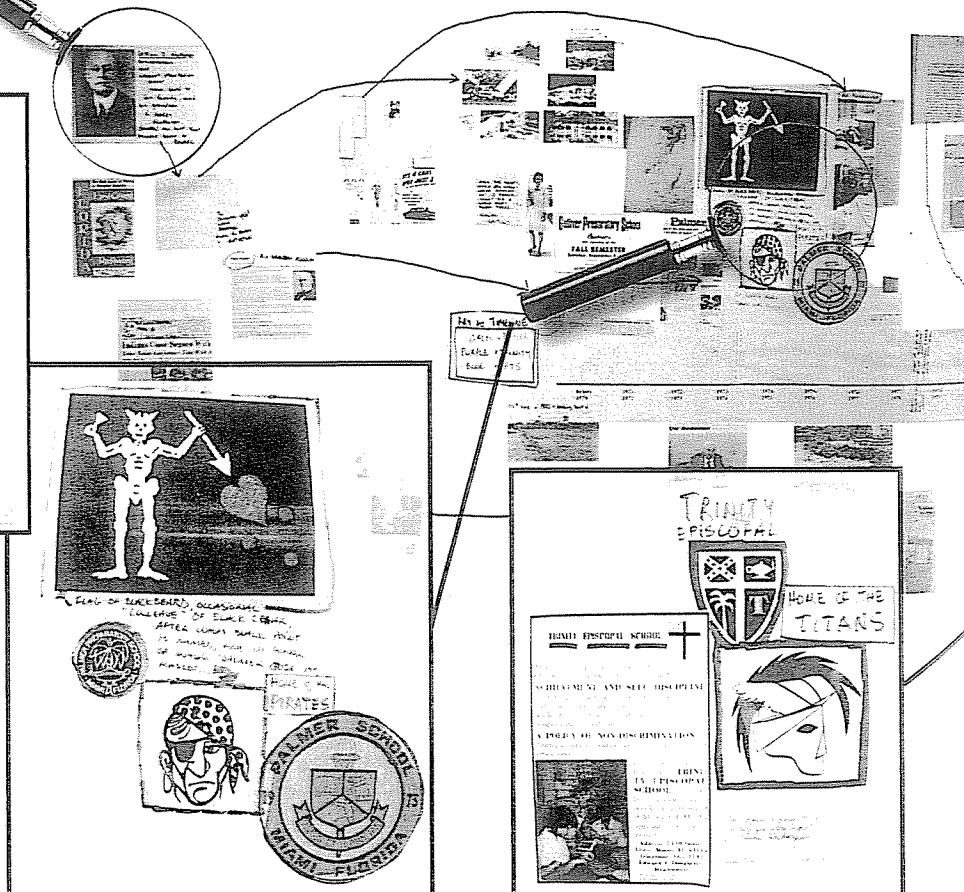
ACTUAL TIMELINE ARRANGED BY PTS STUDENTS DURING THEIR RESEARCH



Above: William J. Matheson donor of
of the land that would become PTS

Right: Palmer School crest, Pirate
mascot and flag of Blackbeard, whom
Black Point Marina is named after

Far Right: Trinity School crest,
Titan mascot, and advertisement

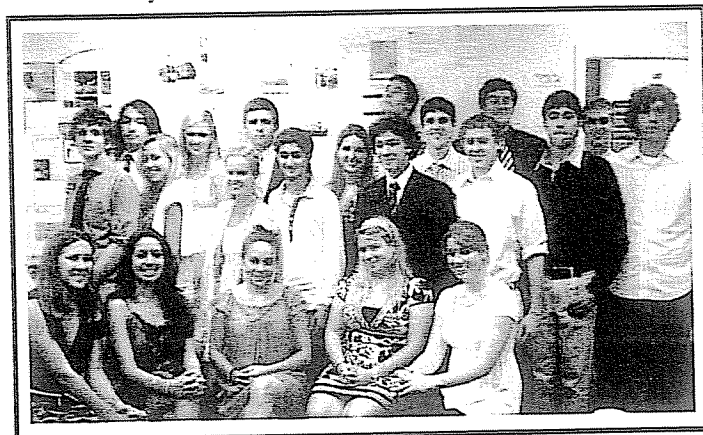


Then, in talking with my colleagues who had attended the CityTERM workshop in New York over the past few summers, it occurred to me that with a little tinkering, College Writing could become a year-long project-based course. The topic of South Florida presented itself as a suitable complement to courses that seniors might already be taking: The Universe Story, US Government, Diaspora, and Environmental Science. All of this appeared to fall in line with a good part of Palmer Trinity's mission, clearly stated, to build a sense of connection with the community, to develop a curriculum of sustainability, and to cultivate a sense of stewardship of the campus. And our project would be simple, but ambitious: We would write a history of Palmer Trinity School.

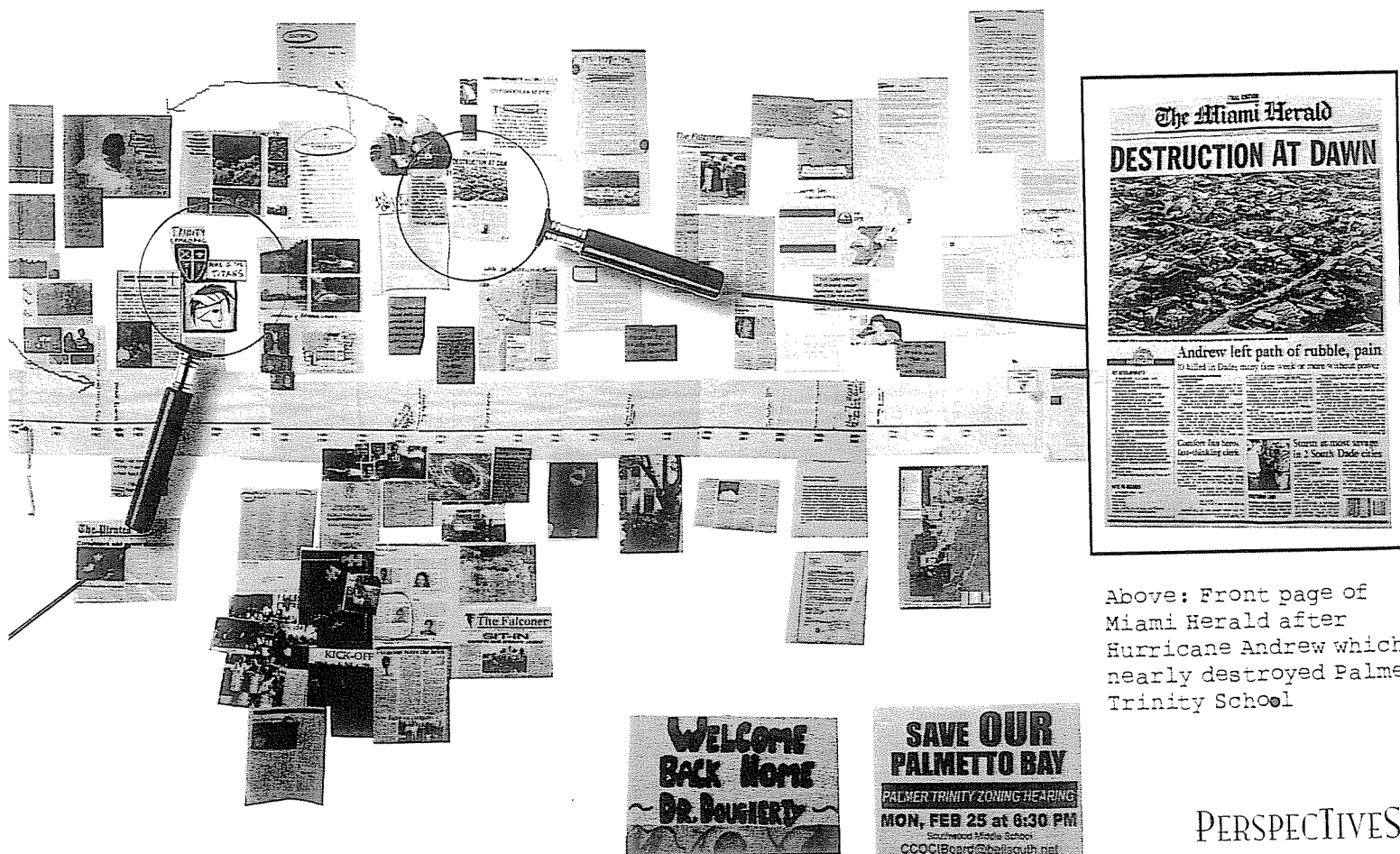
Not surprisingly, Writing South Florida involved turning the classroom inside-out – that is, sending the students into the histories of their own families and neighborhoods, as well as directly to the Historical Museum of Southern Florida. Likewise, we made an effort to have visitors to the classroom – the authors Alex Stepick (*City on the Edge*) and Les Standiford (*Last Train to Paradise*), director Billy Corben (*Cocaine Cowboys*), as well as the dozens of subjects we interviewed for our history manuscript – including Susan Keedy, Mike Ferguson, Ned Dougherty, Jeff Devin, Laura Walker, and Gordy O'Neil.

After a semester of developing their skills and a semester of research and writing, the 28 students in Writing South Florida have compiled a PTS history that weighs in at over 100 pages, with many never-before-seen photos. They've done their best to tell the story of Palmer Trinity in a fair and balanced way, and with as much detail as possible. I am very proud of their accomplishment; I look forward to its publication when the text is finally ready.

As the students wrote to open the chapter on the difficult merger years at PTS, "History, of course, is very complicated and extremely subjective. After all, the history of a school, of Palmer, Trinity, and Palmer Trinity will always be as one remembers it oneself. We have done our best to form the most accurate picture from as many points of view as possible. Just as the merger was a combination of different schools, students, teachers, and ideas, this [book] is a candid combination of the stories of the people and circumstances which eventually combined to form the place we know today as Palmer Trinity."



Back Row (L to R): Francisco Ojeda, Harry Lam, Megan Cunningham, Stephen Ludovici, Christine Erice, Chris Balcells, Carlos Vasquez, Gregg Steinman, Diego Alonso Middle Row: Anne Jensen, Xannie DeOlazarra, Jorge Colindres, Judd Smith, Thomas Torbert, Tommy Rincon, Juan Policastro Seated: Shea Adam, Ariel Moger, Christina Gil, Alessia Bachrach, Cori Capik



Above: Front page of Miami Herald after Hurricane Andrew which nearly destroyed Palmer Trinity School